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SUBJECT: IRAQI SPEAKER ON FUTURE OF THE PRESIDENCY, BUDGET,
AND COALITION MANEUVERING

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gary A. Grappo, for reasons
1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Iraqi Council of Representatives (COR) Speaker Iyad Sammarra'i confirmed for Pol M/C January 4 that the Constitution made clear that Iraq's Presidency Council would not continue after the end of the term of the current government, and the new President would not have the veto. He told Pol M/C it might be possible for the COR to vote on a package of key constitutional amendments (including extending the Presidency Council) before the end of its session, but he did not support holding the required national referendum (within two months of COR passage) at the same time as the March 7 elections. Regarding the budget, Sammarra'i said that both he and the PM wanted to see passage as soon as possible and blamed inaction on lack of discipline at the COR, which was reflected in poor attendance. Sammarra'i described the draft Electoral Code of Conduct as important but possibly losing political support. Shifting into full-bore political analysis, Sammarra'i assessed the prospects of various coalitions and noted in particular that while Iyad Allawi's coalition was poised to do well, it had political figures that were completely unacceptable to the key potential post-election coalition partners and was unlikely to hold together after the elections. End Summary.

PRESIDENCY COUNCIL AND ITS VETO SEEN DISAPPEARING

¶2. (C) Iraqi Speaker of the Council of Representatives (COR) Iyad Sammarra'i confirmed to Pol M/C January 4 that according to the Constitution, the Presidency Council would disappear at the end of the current government, replaced by a single president who would not have veto power. In his view, this might possibly pose problems in the government formation process. A more serious issue to be faced would be the lack of any check on the power of the prime minister. One solution he noted would be to increase the authority of the Speaker, whose power is currently constrained by COR rules of procedure requiring consensus between the Speaker and the two deputy speakers on all key issues.

BUT CONSTITUTIONAL FIX NOT YET A HIGH PRIORITY

¶3. (C) Despite the seriousness of the issue, Sammarra'i said that he had not been seriously involved in the constitutional amendments process in the COR, explaining that he had left the issue to others in the COR and in his political bloc. The Speaker also made clear that he was not enthusiastic about seeing expedited action. He told Pol M/C it might be possible for the COR to vote on a package of key constitutional amendments (including extending the Presidency Council) before the end of its session, but he did not support holding the required national referendum (within two months of COR passage) at the same time as the March 7 elections. The other option would be to leave the entire issue for the next COR. Sammarra'i claimed that until now he had not received crystallized views of the party blocs on how

to proceed but hoped to meet with them in the next few days. The Speaker expressed significant interest in what Pol M/C had been told by party bloc leaders and others on the issue, signaled COR member Selim al-Jebouri as the point person for his political bloc, Tawafuq, on this issue, and expressed a willingness to work closely with the USG on the issue.

BUDGET STILL AN ISSUE

¶4. (C) Regarding the budget, Sammarra'i said that both he and the PM wanted to see passage as soon as possible, Qand the PM wanted to see passage as soon as possible, considering it a priority before the end of the session. He blamed inaction on lack of discipline at the COR, which was reflected in poor attendance and inability to pass legislation. He pledged his best efforts in the coming days to get a quorum at the COR at least once a week, perhaps by signaling ahead of time to members that a particular day was the most important for attendance that week.

ELECTORAL CODE OF CONDUCT LOSING SUPPORT

¶5. (C) Sammarra'i described the draft Electoral Code of Conduct as well-intentioned and important, especially in seeking to place restrictions on the way senior government officials could use the powers of their office to further their electoral prospects. He noted that the Minister of Interior for example controlled large units with significant powers for arrest and detention and the PM had access to huge sums of money he could dispense for patronage. However, Sammarra'i expressed concern that some of the articles in the law were unconstitutional or otherwise placed unwarranted

restrictions on the government in the lawful exercise of its functions. The draft law, currently back for review with the Legal Committee, required amendment to have prospect of passage but he questioned whether the bill had enough support to reach that point. According to Sammarra'i, the Kurds, led by President Talabani, did not support the bill.

¶6. (C) He expressed concern that the COR had wasted valuable time on the bill and described it as a victim of the increasingly complex political calculations that the party blocs were making in the run-up to the elections. He noted for example that ISCI had supported the bill early on, especially during the heated attacks on the electoral commission (IHEC) in the fall, but that support had cooled as ISCI seemed to be looking increasingly at partnering up at some point with the PM's State of Law alliance, which opposed the bill (septel).

SAMMARRA'I'S QUICK TAKE ON COALITION DATING SCENE

¶7. (C) Shifting into full-bore political analysis, Sammarra'i observed that even as ISCI pursued its potential alliance with Maliki, it was also cooperating with Iyad Allawi's Iraqi National Movement (INM). Sammarra'i said that Maliki had shared some of his internal polling data showing that the PM's alliance would win 95 seats in the election, while the ISCI-led Iraqi National Alliance would win 71 and Allawi's group 61 seats. The Speaker noted that during his recent trip to Jordan, people had been extremely optimistic about the Allawi's electoral prospects. While Allawi's coalition might perform well in the election, it had elements that were completely unacceptable to the key potential coalition partners Allawi would need to be a serious contender for the PM job. Allawi has good relations with the Kurds and with ISCI (much less so with Maliki and Da'awa). However, the Kurds will not accept Allawi's political allies like Osama Najaifi in any larger coalition, and "the Shi'a will never Sunni MP Saleh al-Mutlaq," noted Sammarra'i. "And those people are his major political allies." Consequently, even if Allawi wins a large number of seats, he will not be able to make a deal with the other groups mobilizing the full strength of his coalition. Sammarra'i predicted that many of the key political allies in Allawi's coalition would end up

disappointed, possibly with him leaving them in the lurch to ally himself with some post-election Shia-Kurdish bloc. Sammarra'i assessed that ISCI and Maliki's SLA would exploit this weakness in Allawi's coalition, post-election.

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